



Arden

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Spring 2006

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This issue of Arden is dedicated to
Lynda Byrne
for her continuous support and loyalty
to the journal.

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The Ictus Women

Crystal Woods

A scansion of the poem revealed the opposition.

"These lines have feminine endings," the professor explained,
 "and those have masculine." From that day on, we knit
 booties on the ends of each line, the feet inside
 obscured by pink or blue. And never again equal.

Breve:

the curved underside of a breast
 a shallow puddle, a receptacle,
 the sagging shape of an apron filled with apples,
 a round place where babies curl inside,
 the half-moons fingernails leave in the headboard

Ictus:

a javelin, a rifle slung over a shoulder,
 an erect penis
 the line graph of rising power
 the upstroke of the capital A and of the Alpha
 the word itself a barb on the tongue

Trochee and Iamb, opposite like sex organs,
 each needed, some say, to breed meter.
 But metrical feet are sexless as our own.

Trochee suggests women are poorly made,

that even strong ones break eventually.
But in my life I have seen them: Ictus Women
who stretched muscles and moved
bones out of place,
who were scared by the shadows they made.

My grandmother found her husband dead
on the porch and herself round with twins.
She raised six girls alone, washing other people's clothes
with bleach-blistered fingers never privileged
enough for a wedding ring. One November she collapsed,
paralyzed from lack of food, but the girls ate their
suppers, each slanted fork a defiant ictus.

From age ten my mother tended neighbors' kids,
waited tables by fifteen to pay for lights,
then escaped to college. Children followed—
thirty kindergarteners, then two of her own
then two of someone else's.
At fifty-four she earned a master's degree,
and her keyboard clicked with iambic fervor.

The women I know do not break, do not
force their mouths into weakly pleasant breves.
The women I know are Ictus Women, leaning into the wind.

Christmas 1969

Sidney Lanier

my mother's eyes
squinting against the bright Florida sun
she rests lightly on her new Christmas bicycle
beside her ungrateful sister
her smile is bright
and honest
making the most of this fatherless holiday
the dimples, which never surfaced again,
were in their place i located by heart
my mother's eyes stare at the camera
burn through the photograph
and bury themselves deep in my chest
with matching intensity, i stare back
and i know this face to be my own.

As Good as It Gets

Rhea Harp

I walk through those hated, double doors. The sound of music assaults my ears. And, as the doors close, my eyes squint, trying to adjust to the darkness. I start cursing the fact that I have to work another Saturday night, but I'm not feeling too bummed because, hey, I always make money. Making money is never depressing, but I know that every time I walk into that strip club I'm going to see the same thing: three stages of strippers with guys all around, bartender talking to the token drunk guy, waitresses carrying their little trays and, of course, my boss. I grab my tray, insert my favorite shiny lip-gloss and a lighter for people's nasty cigarettes into my pocket, get some money out of my purse for my bank and start off.

I start closest to the bar and work my way around to a regular customer. *Hey, honey. How are you tonight? Having a good time? You've been waiting for me to order? Oh, how sweet. What'll it be—the usual Jack and Coke? Yeah, I do know you, don't I?*" Smile. Walk away. On my way to the bar a guy stops me and gives me a five dollar tip for no reason and tells me, "Smile. It's not that bad." I cheer up, a little, at the reminded prospect of money, but then I feel the first throb of the night in my cheeks. By four thirty in the morning when I'm finally drifting off to sleep I'll have a permanent smile and look like the Joker.

Then there will be the questions, the same questions that I get so tired of answering. I wonder sometimes if the bouncer hands out a FAQ sheet at the door so guys will have something to say. (Like

a door prize with every five dollar cover charge!) I answer nicely because, well, money is what it's about. "Why aren't you on stage? Don't you want to be on stage? You're the prettiest girl in here; do you know how much *more* money you'd make strip-ping?" All the while, I'm smiling and imagining one of the huge, heavy shoes the stripper on stage is wearing flying off her foot while she does her sexy leg kick, giving the pompous pervert a permanent concussion. The ones that ask are never the good tip-pers. Like their cheap asses would ever throw down more money than that dollar they put on my tray. I have my answer down to a fine art—*It takes a special kind of girl to strip, and I'm just not that special.* Or, if I'm feeling feisty, simply, *I have more class than that.*

The customers that tip well, like a five dollar tip on a three dollar bottle of water, are the ones who respect you for not taking your clothes off. Still, their conversations are all the same, too: *What are you like? What are your cares?* Blah, Blah, Blah and finally, the kicker, *Do you have a boyfriend?* What the dopes always fail to realize is that no woman with an IQ above the level of mentally retarded would date a guy that frequents strip clubs. The night drags on, and, at three thirty in the morning, I count my precious tips, tip out my bartender and go home, hoping not to get hit by a drunk driver who enjoyed their Saturday night a little too much.

Enjoying Saturday nights is never my problem. I'm the kind of person who could have fun at an insurance convention. But let me just say that I'm not a girl who ever thought I'd be a waitress in a strip club and I would have to *really* try to have fun without letting the nonsense and total depravity of the situation get to me. There are a lot of easy things about my job, but there are also hard things. Like putting up with men whose heads resemble their nether region when they speak.

I have learned very quickly, while paying for my college tuition, that, sometimes, you have to do what you have to do. Is it fun working at place where women are degraded for money, and your feet stick to the floor when you walk? Hell no! But it pays for college. Okay . . . I have to clean people's houses too, and, believe me, that it isn't fun either! However, coming from a family with no college graduates has made me push through the days when I feel like plucking out my eyelashes, one by one, and screaming insanely at the next innocent person who walks by me. My college degree is the golden prize that shines before me when I close my eyes. *Not* the incredibly round, white butt that gets too close to me for comfort while I'm cleaning up empty beer bottles from around a stage!

But this is my life! At least until I'm finished with school. I quit working as a waitress at regular places because I was working myself to death and not making any money, then I got offered this job at The Butt Hut, as I so fondly call it. It has unfortunately become a permanent stone in my fashionable shoes. It isn't the money. That is good, if not great. It's the fact that I have to put up with things that are worse than platefuls of half eaten spaghetti. Like a really drunk guy throwing up on my foot and trying to order another drink less than a minute later. Men throwing twenties on stage, then tipping me a whole forty-five cents on the beer they just bought. Maybe it's the girl who calls me a slut when I'm walking away because her boyfriend dragged her into a strip club. Or it could be guys whistling or snapping their fingers at you like you were a dog.

I put up with these things four days a week so that, in one more year, I can cross a stage and feel better about my life than I ever have. People say that college is supposed to be the best years of

your life—*Where have I been?* I ask you. Don't get me wrong—school is my future and it definitely keeps me on my toes—but I think the "token college life" only comes to kids whose parents can afford to send them to a school that costs eight to ten thousand dollars a semester, buy them a new car, and pay for their apartment. I know what you're thinking—and you can bet your ass I'm jealous! I just haven't had one of those college careers that allowed me the freedom of solely worrying about a Spanish test in the morning. Truthfully, I don't want the sorority life. I just want the security of being able to pay my bills and have time to do my homework. Fact is—all I really want is time to do my homework when music isn't blaring in the background and a short Mexican, smitten with me, isn't following me around saying in his accent, "Come on, bebe."

I do know one thing for a fact. No doubts, no apprehension, and no regret. I can work at this strip club and never become what it produces, because it is a temporary place for me. That I know. I have never worked harder for anything in my life than my college education. People say it is bad to have a big head, but I think knowing who you are is a very important thing, and knowing who you are lets you know what you are better than. I think if girls knew that in middle school and high school, maybe they wouldn't wind up stripping to names like *Diamond* and *Desire* when they are thirty-years-old. *Gross!*

So, maybe working at a place that makes you feel nauseous isn't the worst thing in the world. I don't care if *Little Lacy*, "The World's Smallest Stripper," does come to my graduation party. I have learned that I cannot move on from places that I hate, simply because I hate them. Right now, this one is essential to my livelihood. Making the best of any situation is, in my opinion, what

makes someone a survivor. I may not be proud of the places where I work, but I am proud of what I will get from them. Like that beautiful stamp that says *Paid In Full* on my college invoice. Is this as good as it gets? No. But looking forward to all the good things that will come is what makes my life tolerable. Life is good. It's the journey that sometimes sucks!

Angling for Dolores

Nick Norwood

My best friend Pick's got a wife. That son of a bitch. Her name's Dolores. Dolores the Magnificent, I call her. She's almost as tall as Pick: five foot nine, maybe ten. A true Amazon. Pretty girl: soft features, brown hair, graceful muscular arms. And legs! She calls me Little Peter, or Li'l Pete, which I guess is apropos, since I'm not but in the five foot six and three quarters range. Me and Dolores get along swimmingly, though, and like to hang out together. She works out at the paper mill and tells me about some of the burning issues women discuss in the break room: Not!

Dolores talks about fishing. Period. And she by-god knows her stuff, because when she and Pick aren't in a knock-down drag-out war—which they are about 50 percent of the time—he takes *her* fishing instead of me. Good old Pick. But the fact is, Dolores is a better noodler than Pick. Better form I think.

And that's what's got me in deep shit over Dolores—because of this one time Pick decided to take both of us fishing, and I got to watch her work. We were at the local reservoir. Pick and I remained in the boat while Dolores went down on a routine noodle. A week earlier, they'd planted a pair of boxes ("artificial nesting habitats") in a hot spot and knew they'd have a fish. Dolores was in a Day-Glo orange bikini. It was so bright that just before she dove in you could see the reflection of it on top of the water. I know you could see the reflection because while she was standing there in Pick's johnboat—after she shimmied out of her cut-off shorts and the bikini bottoms were sort of riding up on her

cheeks—how I know is, Pick and I were sitting shoulder-to-shoulder, side-by-side, right behind her, and I was keeping *extremely* intent on keeping my head down and my eyes on something other than Dolores's bikini bottoms (knowing that if Pick caught me ogling Dolores's moon he might, say, impale me on his forearm like a mudcat) and there it was, that reflection on top of the dark green-colored water: you could even see how the suit was riding up on her cheeks, forming two perfect partial eclipses. And then she dove in and you could see it glowing orange underwater, the two pieces of her swim suit. You could see it glide down to the bottom like a pair of redfish doing one of them synchronized swimming deals, the only thing in the green water visible to the observer, which was me, sitting in the boat beside Pick.

Then the swim suit jerked like two live wires. A storm of bubbles rose to the surface and Pick started grinning. "Didn't get but a little one," he said. "Might go ten pounds. If she's lucky."

Dolores was already cussing when she got to the top: "Goddamn this silly goddamn orange Day-Glo son of a bitch! It scared off the damn fish!"

And then, ladies and gentlemen, she did something that changed my life. She pulled that damn Day-Glo orange bikini off and threw it in the boat, leaving her body parts uncovered. Naked as hell, ladies and gentlemen! And even though she was still underwater and couldn't be seen, it was just the *idea* of it, of her complete nakedness, of her (excuse my language) nudity. . . . I was suddenly changed. A changed man, folks. I ain't shitting you one bit. I began to tremble all over. I tried not to look in the water for fear she'd rise up out of it and I'd just faint dead-away. So I looked in the boat, but right there staring me in the face was that damn Day-Glo orange bathing suit and the bra parts were

pooched out where her (excuse my language) breasts had been. Oh, goddamn! I had to look somewhere else, so I just pointed my eyes straight up—at God, ladies and gentlemen. Hell, what would you do?

Then Dolores went back down, and in a minute she came to the top with a fish she'd grabbed out of the other box, slung it over the top, and said, "Li'l Pete, I'm about to climb in the boat." Which, of course, was a warning for me to turn my head the other way. But I might as well have been looking, because every movement she made sort of defined itself through that flimsy little aluminum boat hull: when it listed over a little to one side I knew Dolores was climbing up, and I could see in my mind's eye what she must have looked like, could see her bare (here comes that word again) breasts rising up over the gunwales. Oh, goddamn! Then, while I was still looking the other way, I could feel the boat rock a little as she stepped into her bikini bottoms, sort of ungraceful like but in a real cute, sexy kind of way, and then I could hear the elastic waistband snapping as she pulled it up over her womanhood, then the elastic legbands snapping as she covered her cheeks, those perfect lunar surfaces: I could see it all, ladies and gentlemen, every bit of it, as clear as if I'd been looking, as clear as from me to you! I'm changed, I tell you. Changed!

Dolores rides a motorcycle: a '49 Indian, fully restored, leather saddle bags, wide tires, pearl paint job, and chromed plumb out. A lot of people think it's a Harley-Davidson and say dumb things to her, like, "Hey, nice Harley," and she tells them, in that sweet-sarcastic way she has, "I wouldn't piss on a Harley-Davidson if the son of a bitch was on fire." And that lets them know, in a friendly way, that they don't know anything about motorcycles.

Dolores comes to pick me up at my double-wide. We go get us a

six-pack, head off to the woods. Sit around shooting the shit. Talk about fishing. I'll be in there and I'll hear this sort of deep-throated rumbling noise, and then I'll know it's Dolores. So I'll just get straight up from there and go outside and climb on the back of her Indian. It's got a little butt-pad passenger seat mounted on the rear fender and it's just the right size for my butt. Dolores will be standing over the bike, straddling it, wearing her tight, flared Levi's and a real clingy T-shirt and her Vietnam-era jungle combat boots, and after I climb on, she'll goose the accelerator one more time, and Boom! Off like a pair of screaming by-god banshees! I have to hold onto the fender to keep from falling off: mud and road tar get splattered on my fingers, but it's the only alternative to hanging on to Dolores, putting my arms around her mid-section, because if Pick saw me doing that he'd probably tear my head off and shit down my neck—his favorite thing to threaten me with. Besides, I'd look pathetic, don't you think, hanging on to a woman like that? It's called dignity, ladies and gentlemen. You got to get you some.

But anyway, this is all ancient history of the recent past, me palling around with Dolores. After the Day-Glo orange bikini incident, I decided that even though Pick was my best friend, he wasn't, after all, nothing but a scum dog son of a bitch and if I wanted Dolores there wasn't no real good reason why I shouldn't just go on and go for it. I decided it was time for me to act. For once in my by-god life it was time for me to do something. I don't think it was the bikini alone that did it: that bathing suit was just what they call a catalyst. It shocked me into this revelation I had, the way I felt when she slung it off, the way I wanted to just lay down in the bottom of that flatbottom johnboat and just cry, just blubber like, say, some damn pathetic fool or something. I knew

right then I had to do something about it or my life would be a senseless waste of good material.

I began to make a plan. What my plan was: I'd wait until Pick did something stupid like, say, let it get heard around town how he got drunk and went home with some flimsy little beer maid and him and Dolores would get in a violent not-no-police-action kind of war. And I'd just sit home and wait for the sweet rumbling sound of her '49 Indian.

I didn't have to wait long. Three days, count 'em, not but three days after the Day-Glo orange bikini incident, Pick slept over at flimsy, little old Janice Roxley's house and let everybody in town hear about it. Bragged about it, that dumb son of a bitch. I headed home soon as I heard him shooting off his damn mouth, because I knew it wasn't long until Dolores would know all about it too. It even struck me that Pick *wanted* her to hear about it. That dumb son of a bitch. But anyway, here she came, rumbling along, revving that engine. We got us some Millers and headed for the woods. She drove us out to a little fish pond me and her and Pick had just a week earlier got through dynamite blasting (another one of our favorite fishing techniques). She parked us right on the edge of it, in the shade of some willow trees, in a place where it was kind of damp.

So, here it is: this is my big moment, the time when I'm going to take charge of my destiny. First, I have two beers to sort of buff up my courage, cause it's going to take some doing to get this out of my mouth, I'll tell you right now it is. Dolores has been going on for several minutes about what a lowdown stupid shit son of a bitch Pick is. Now, she's quiet, has her jungle combat boots resting on the butt pad, her head laid back, and is just trying to take it easy. It's my time, and I know it.

"Dolores," I say, "I'm glad you brought me out here today. There's something I've been meaning to say to you, and don't stop me because I'm going to say it right now." (I have to say it all at once like this just to get it to come out, I have to just sort of explode out with it.)

"Little Peter, what the hell are you talking about?" she says.

I get choked up and can't speak, open my mouth but only grunting can seem to come out.

"Li'l Pete, are you going to choke to death?" she says.

And then I do the big-balled-est thing I've ever done in my life, for just a second here I feel like a by-god stand-up man of action. And I just reach right over and kiss Dolores right on the cheek. I make it as sweet as you ever seen, ladies and gentlemen, just right there, plant it right smack-dab on her cheek, and say, "Dolores, Pick didn't nothing but a scum dog son of a bitch."

What happens: Dolores looks at me like I'm something she never considered could even exist in the world. I can tell it's taking her just a second to think about what has just transpired between us. And I'm thinking, Pete, you lucky son of a bitch, you've done it, you've got her, she's yours.

And then, what happens is, I reach over to kiss her again, and what happens, Dolores reaches up and grabs me by the back of the neck and shoves me over, head-downwards, face-first, into the wet, soggy muck on the edge of that fish pond. And then she starts laughing like I've just told the funniest redneck joke she's ever heard. And then I hear her say, "Pete, you dumb little fucking pervert. That's why I love you so much. You're weird. You're a pretty good actor, too, Pete. For a second there you had me going."

And then I don't know how to act—at all—and so I just lay here

a minute.

And then Dolores does something I really can't explain. What she does: she climbs on her big Indian and cranks that bad boy up, that loud randy-assed son of a bitch.

"That's a good one, Pete," she hollers out over the engine noise. "You little fucking pervert! I can't wait to tell the girls in the break room tomorrow!"

And when I finally get my face up out of the mud all I can see is tail-pipe, tail-light, and Dolores's hair streaming behind her. She just left me there, knowing I'd have to walk all the way back to town. On foot. Walking.

And how it is with me, crouched down on the edge of this fish pond: I've got muck all over my face, in my eyes and ears and mouth, in my nose. It tastes like spoilt tuna, and it smells like, I'll never forget it from now on, it smells like about a whole lifetime's worth of dead, rotten, stinking fish.

Well, needless to say, it was not a pleasant walk back home. Covered in gooey, fish-smelling pond muck. It's all in my hair, all over my clothes. I think some of the orifices in my head might be packed with it. I've got some mossy seaweed-looking stuff hanging down from my shoulders and I'm so depressed I don't even bother to remove it. It's a dirt road I'm on, deep in the woods, and I pick up a stick to defend myself from the larger varieties of mosquito we have here in the Deep South. My spirits are dragging ground like the tits on a pregnant dachshund. It sort of gives a general slumpingness to my posture, so that I'm a goo-incrusted, seaweed-shaggy, muck-faced, slumping, Creature-from-the-Black-Lagoon-looking boy, trudging down a dirt road, through the deep woods of the Deep South, trying to defend myself from B-52 mosquitoes with a walking stick—with the specters of a failed roman-

tic quest and just a generally failed, fucked-up life hanging over my head—and waiting for me, maybe around the next corner, whenever I reach town, sometime real soon, is the promise of a good old country ass whuppin at the hands of one Pick Thomas. That long-sideburned son of a bitch.

I felt it was time for serious reflection.

So what I do is, I dig right in to the archaeology of my love life, as I'm walking along, *slop, slop, slop*, along that dirt road. It doesn't take much digging. Scraping the surface will put you clean through to the other side. There was a cute girl in junior high named Harriet Nussbaum. I had a sweet little thing going with her. But at the time I was busy with my project for an upcoming social studies fair and couldn't devote myself, fully, to her attentions. As a result she was swept away by a ninth grader named Doug Witherspoon, a star on the junior high track team who wore three sets of ankle weights wherever he went and had calf muscles the size of a Yule log.

After that, when I *was* in high school—well, as you may have gathered, I wasn't exactly the Big Man On Campus, though I was the football team mascot and Special Assistant to the Equipment Manager—I used to get to ride on the team bus when we went to football games and the players would all run their fingers through my hair for good luck. I was the first one off the bus and I'd stand there just outside the door, while the rest of the team and the coaches had their heads bowed down in prayer, praying for touchdowns and field goals and quarterback sacks; and when the players came down the steps and out of the bus—yelling things like "Let's kick ass!" and "Kill the bastards!"—I'd be standing right there and they'd run their fingers through my hair, tousle my head, just ruffle my feathers all up, and *whoop! whoop! whoop!*

some more. It's pretty much common knowledge I'm responsible for our class-IA district football second-place finish my senior year. All that good luck they got from rubbing my head.

But one time, after a successful campaign against the Mansfield Marauders, the players were so pumped up they sort of offered one of the cheerleaders as a gift to me. A sweet, little freshman named Cynthia Bramble. Sweet, Sweet Cynthia I called her. Some of the linemen picked her up, carried her over to my seat, and just dropped her right in my lap. Through no fault of hers or mine, her bloomed butt landed right on the palm of my hand. She screamed and all the football players laughed, but I was in love with her for some months after that. I used to try to call her on the phone, but someone else in her family always answered and told me things like, "Cynthia has come down with a strange, unpronounceable disease and may die any minute. She can't come to the phone." I stayed in love with her through Christmas, but when school resumed after the break I learned she was pregnant and had eloped with one of those same linemen that dropped her in my lap. Three marriages later, she is now the proud mother of a junior-varsity tight end, two fine young junior high cornerbacks (twins), and a pee-wee league third-down-and-long defensive specialist.

Since high school, I have maintained my sanity through auto-eroticism.

And there it is, ladies and gentlemen, the complete history of my romantic involvements. That is pretty much it. Except for the part about how my failed romances led to the psychological process Freud called sublimation, wherein I used my exponentially frustrated sexual energy in the pursuit of catfish, alligator gar, and big-mouth bass. Short and sweet, but oh so sad.

Anyhow, this is what I'm reflecting on as I walk down this dirt road, locked in mortal combat with U2-spy-plane-type mosquitoes, sneaky bastards that infiltrate your undershorts and leave welts the size of a nickel. But as I'm thinking about this, it dawns on me that there is a definite conclusion to be drawn from this: women want a man of action and will not stand for a substitute, no matter how sensitive, caring, and understanding he may be. Let him be a lying, flatulent, uneducated brute of a wool-hound: as long as he's a man of action he is to be desired. My problem all along has been that I'm too intellectual and sensitive for my own good. I thought to myself, What I need to do is to by-god go demand me some pussy! I've got my needs and I've got my rights. I'm being discriminated against! I thought, I ought to march into town right this goddamned minute, call the American Civil Liberties Union, and demand they secure my constitutional right to drop bait in the womanhood of America!

But then, as is so often the case with me, my intellect took over. Didn't I just try the direct approach? I asked myself. Didn't she just pore-pack my face with pond muck? Hell, what are you—stupid? You've got to get her attention first, make her want you, get her good and by-god lathered up, or you can just as well forget it.

And then it occurred to me, ladies and gentlemen, as it no doubt has already occurred to you, the way I could both become a man of action and gain the woman I so desired: challenge Pick Thomas to a fist-fight and then pile drive his ass.

A bold and daring ambition, to be sure. But, hell, I had to ask myself, who knows more about Pick Thomas's weak spots than me? Nobody. That nose-haired son of a bitch. All I had to do was wait for the right time and place, then windmill his ass, in a way that would guarantee he'd stay windmilled.

Hmm. . . . Maybe that is kindly a tall order after all. I mean, with the element of surprise and the right equalizer—like, say, an ax handle or a piece of lead pipe—I thought I had a pretty good chance of taking him. But keeping him took was a different matter.

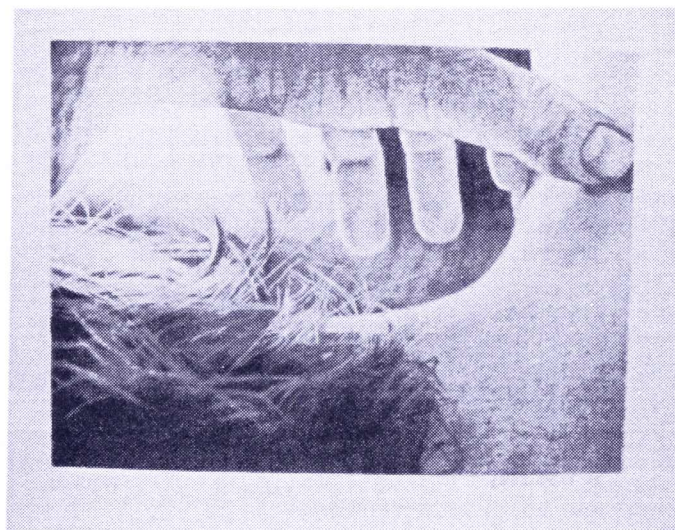
What to do. . . .

What to do? Oh, hell, ladies and gentlemen, let's skip it. It's a damned old existential question anyway. And you and me both know damned well there ain't no getting to the bottom of them. As I write you this, I am laid up in the Bi-regional Hospital of Our Lady of the Woolen Smock, over here outside of Corsicana. I've got a broke leg, a broke arm, a broke coccyx (I'll let you look it up), and my jaw is wired shut tighter than an alligator on methamphetamines. What happened? Well, *duh*. Pick Thomas windmilled *my* ass is what happened. What the hell did you expect? Whipped my ass till my nose bled (hence the coccyx issue). Then did the limb damage. Then tossed me in the Dipsy Dumpster outside the bait shop, with the other dead bait and what-not. Dignity, you ask? Ha-ha, very funny. You ought to take that show on the road. You're quite a damned comedian, aren't you? Maybe someday you'll have a run-in with a redneck like Pick Thomas, hopped up on vengeance, dead set on whuppin ass. We'll see who's laughing then.

But anyway, I can't fool with y'all no more. I've got a date. That's right. Dolores is coming to see me. Fact, I think I hear the sweet rumblings of her '49 by-god Indian right now. See, she feels guilty about how I got my ass whupped out of desire for her. Her coming to see me is kind of a pity deal. But, hey, when you're not a man of action, but instead an intellectual like me, you've got

to take what you can get. And that's my word of wisdom for you, ladies and gentlemen, what I've learned from this here incident: in fishing and in love, there ain't nothing to do but go on and take whatever you can get, however you can get it.

*TR1*Les Cuebas



Comfort Food

Melanie K. Greenwood

I only like pepperoni before it is cooked.
And I only like peanuts in peanut butter.
I do not like bell peppers, green, red or yellow.
Sliced tomatoes are heaven. But not cooked. I won't eat them.
I'll only eat bread if it's toasted. Unless it is sourdough.
Spaghetti is my favorite. I could eat it every night.

I think about food feverishly when I am alone at night,
watching CNN, drinking a cup of cold hot chocolate.
I think about a warm piece of peach-bread smothered with butter,
or sliced squash that is peak perfect yellow.
I talk and cook my favorite foods for my friends. For them
it is about that soothing silence of watching dough

rise to reach the clouds, to look like clouds, dough
that is ready to bake, ready to fill the night air
with the aroma of cinnamon, ready to push out the brutal cold,
ready for a perfect little square of butter
that sits right in the middle, a yellow
square of comfort that melts into the slice I give them

with pride. It is delicious to them,
my bread, made with made from scratch sourdough.
Bread that complements sitting on the porch at night,
watching the water wiggle down the street like the melted butter

dripping from our fresh baked bread. We laugh at the yellow moon, large, looming like our bellies, like a lump of dough.

We talk together about solving stress by kneading dough. Pushing. Pressing. Patting. Beating the loneliness of each night, with the perfect slice, that does not too fast get too cold, smothered with sweet delicious really creamy butter, and putting on the perfect dress, the one that is yellow with the pretty flowers, that makes me feel pretty in front of them.

It is hard for me to feel pretty in front of them.
But they do not seem to notice I look like a dough girl, standing in Times Square on New Years Eve night, invisible, but noticeable, to everyone who looks with cold, eyes at my size, looking like a tub of butter.
They think they can read me, like the words on a yellow

legal pad. Then, with the gust of reality,
The chill of the night stiffens my lonely bones
Like a stick of cold yellow butter.

Ray Malmgren

I'm here to
remove obstacles,
engage targets,
soften defenses,
dismember,
demolish,
and destroy.

The folks back home
need me to do it,
pay me to do it.
Even the protestors –
who hide their pansy asses
behind locked doors –
want me to do it
so they won't have to.

It's my job –
the adrenaline,
the fear,
the shakes,
the yelling,
the shooting first –
always shoot first.

Did you know
you can stay awake
a helluva long time on
Vivarin and cigarettes?
I went three days once.
Just drink a lot of water
so you don't get blocked up.

I know they'll be there
when I go home –
the memories that play over and over –
and I'll try to make them stop
long enough to hold my baby boy
without seeing someone else's
dead child.

26

Gates of Geda Suun

Brandi Epps



Out with the New, In with the Old: Technology Makes Me Nervous

Anna Flournoy

According to my brother, a summa cum laude Georgia Tech graduate, advances in computer and microwave technology double approximately every year and significantly decrease in price. This rate is mind-boggling and alarming at the same time. Take my Apple iPod, for example. For exactly one year, I longed for an iPod to make running more enjoyable and to drown out a cranky baby. Could it get any better than the original iPod: 10,000 songs, 10 hours of listening? For Mother's Day, my husband gave me the new and improved iPod Mini, a sleeker and slimmer design, to sport while doing laps around the park. Definitely better than last year's cookbook. After spending several hours getting educated on my new "Pod," I was off and running—no pun intended.

The honeymoon quickly faded, however, once my computer started crashing every time I charged my iPod. Then, little annoying messages kept popping up on the screen asking if I wanted to download the latest version of iTunes, already hipper than the version available ten minutes previously. The anvil dropped when the iPod Nano came on the market. How dare Apple make a sexier, svelter version than my newborn mini? Now, my once-beloved gadget is feeling neglected and inadequate thanks to its new cousin Nano, only three months younger than Mini. Honestly, how low and little can Apple go? Considering the speed of technological advances, is there any possible way to stay on the cut-

ting edge without going broke and simultaneously losing our minds? Was Apple's new technology actually making my life easier, or making matters worse?

These questions prompted me to pick up my ragged, faded-pink copy of Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. In it, he writes about the struggle to embrace technology in terms of—you guessed it—motorcycle maintenance and repair. My experience riding a motorcycle is limited to one college frat party (Yes, Mom, I wore a helmet), but Pirsig explains the philosophical differences between "technologists" and "anti-technologists":

Somewhere there are people who understand it and run it, but those are technologists and they speak an inhuman language when describing what they do. It's all parts and relationships of unheard-of things that never make any sense no matter how often you hear about them. And their things, their monster keeps eating up land and polluting their air and lakes, and there is no way to strike back at it, and hardly any way to escape it. (16)

Speaking of my mother, she is a fine example of what Pirsig calls an anti-technologist: someone who combats technology in a war on the scale of the *Matrix* movies. My mother claims that she was born with a technology deficiency. "It's simply a matter of biology, Anna. Your father was blessed with it. I was not." "It" is what she needed when my dad purchased our family's first VCR. The blinking 12:00 so annoyed my mother that, instead of reading the VCR manual, she bee-lined for my dad's toolbox and retrieved the electrical tape. No more blinking light.

So where did my father's technological gene come from? My Grandmother was such a gifted student that her peers nicknamed

her Archimedes because she was always the first to answer any math question. She was also stubborn, which earned her the nickname "Stomp." Many years ago, Jack was thrown in, so her official nomenclature became Audrey Ann Archimedes Stomp Jack Williams King. To me she was Grandmommy. Grandmommy's love of learning and teaching resonated in her third grade classroom for 42 years. Every time my family visited her in South Georgia, my brother and I would curl up in her lap before bedtime, where she would read to us for hours. She was also a passionate letter writer. Her letters fill countless boxes in my attic and continue to inspire me to pick up a pen instead of shooting a friend an e-mail.

When I was a freshman in college, Grandmommy decided that she needed a more meaningful and immediate means to communicate with me than the telephone. I had carefully instructed my roommate Sarah to tell any family members who called our dorm that I was, "Studying in the library." Impressed by my tenacious "studying," yet frustrated by remaining incommunicado, she decided to embark on a technological adventure. Her guide? An unassuming librarian. She tutored Grandmommy patiently for over two hours, instructing her in e-mail 101. By the end, Eureka!

Dear Anna,

Hi, this is Grandmommy. How are you? I am typing on a computer in the Donalsonville Library for the first time. I am very proud of how much time you are spending in your library. My arthritis makes typing difficult, so I think I will sign off now and try to call you again.

I love you,

Grandmommy

For once, I actually was in the Furman Library and was shocked to

see her e-mail in my inbox. Immediately, I wrote her a long response, detailing my first few weeks as a collegiate. Two days passed. Another message from my roommate: "Your Grandmother called. Again. She's waiting for the mailman to deliver your e-mail."

Pirsig addresses the Grandmommies of the world when he writes:

The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower. To think otherwise is to demean oneself. (17)

Here, Pirsig broaches a thought-provoking idea—that a life force inhabits both animate and inanimate objects. And we should think of things in our lives, including technology, as being connected to, not as separate entities from, ourselves. This is the stuff Zen is made of, according to Pirsig.

Before my son was born, I decided to trade in my old clunker for a safer, Consumer Report rated vehicle. Unlike my previous death trap, my Volvo features many "user-friendly" bells and whistles, including a digital message center in the front panel.

Unfortunately, the mechanic conveniently forgot to reset the "Time for Service NOW" message after the last tune-up. Not only does the message blink incessantly, it now dings every time I crank the engine. For a while, my mantra was, "The Buddha is in the dashboard. The Buddha is in the dashboard," until I clipped the brick fence around my house as I erratically pulled into the driveway. Cursing the blinking message, tears of frustration welled as I frantically speed-dialed my mother. "Anna," she said reassuringly, "I have some electrical tape right here in the drawer."

*The Vocalist*Shawwna Farrell



*At Niagara*Willie Pace

Food, nor water
Alone can sustain me;
Beauty fuels my soul.
I stand at the waterfall
And ceremoniously watch
The water condense
Atop the nerve tense hairs
That blanket her arms
Like velvety fur.
When that mist
Becomes too heavy
The weighty hairs curl
And release their load
All at once, and form
Rivulets that cascade
Down her delicate arms
And meander gently, like
Small artesian streams,
Through huge crevasses
Forming ancient rivers
To their alluvial deltas
At Arcane places
Yet undiscovered.
I weep in response,
Creating a mighty

Torrent of tears
That intermingle there;
Where up-sprang
Primordial forests
That hold untold
Sacred secrets
Of Love between
A Goddess and mortal man
And I am overcome
With weakness
For your love

Hot Coffee

Sandra Shorey

Morning sounds filter through the darkness,
A gentle wake-up call—

Coaxing me to leave the warmth of my covers,
Venture into the kitchen to find the warmth of you,
And hot coffee

The Neighborhood

J.E. Grisamore



A Troubled Hero

Kathy L. Honea

While their parents stood arguing in the driveway, Anna and her three sisters held hands and climbed into the back seat of the old Buick.

"Git in the car!" the father yelled.

"Junior, you're crazy. You're not taking me anywhere . . . I mean it!"

"Git in or I'll drag you."

Their mother moved slowly into the passenger side and slammed the door. She grabbed the front of her shirt and wiped the tears that were pouring from her eyes. She looked down toward the floor and spoke.

"He's not gonna do it, girls. I mean it; he's not going to hurt me this time."

The father, hearing this declaration, slid in next to her. "Shut up, I'll do what the hell I want," he snapped.

He cranked the car and backed it slowly down the driveway.

The mother quieted down and stared out of the window. The father grew angrier and angrier at her stillness and yelled while pointing his finger at her face.

"You're gonna listen to me, even if I have to kill you to do it."

The mother just sat there, thinking . . . drifting. Anna glared at the spit flying from her father's mouth; his screaming obscenities filled the air. Her ears hurt.

He finally turned his attention to backing the car out of the driveway. Anna rubbed her eyes and looked out the window. She

hated when her father yelled. She loved the days when he was hard at work fixing the car; he, snuggled under the car . . . she, handed him tools. She felt, at those times, that she was helping her father in some way. She didn't know how, but she just knew that somewhere deep inside, he was good and she loved him for that. As they pulled out of the driveway, she watched her friends Lori and Renee play with their dolls in the grass. She pressed her face to the window and waved to them. With big smiles on their faces, they waved back.

The ride was a long and painful one. The girls rocked from side to side, bumping each other until the car finally pulled onto the bank of the bay. Unaware of their children's hysteria, the mother and father began, yet again, to bicker. The children started crying.

"Enough with all that crying," the father roared.

He stopped the car, jumped out, and stormed over to the mother's side.

"Lock your doors, girls. Don't let him in!" the mother screamed.

Fighting the seat sticking to her legs, Anna desperately reached over to push the lock. She struggled to lock their mother's door, but finally was able to. She fell back into the seat with her sisters and watched their mother and father argue back and forth through the hazy window.

"Open the damn door."

"No, Junior, you're not gonna do it, I just won't let you do it!"

"I'll break the window, damn it."

Anna could smell the salt from the Florida waters and felt the cool night air slip through the cracks of the door. The thought of her friends playing at home haunted her. She wondered if they were still playing with their dolls. Closing her eyes, she could see the soft, green grass . . . she could feel it. Oblivious to the ill-fated

conditions, she drifted back from her daydream as irritating pains invaded her stomach; she couldn't remember when it was she ate last.

Anna finally looked over at her sisters. Crying, they were all cramped together, still holding hands. She turned away and looked into the sky. The night was so beautiful. The stars were twinkling. She remembered three days before, when the whole family was sitting at the dinner table, eating fried chicken and fresh collard greens. Her mouth watered.

"Hope!" her mother yelled to the oldest of the four girls.

Startled, Anna looked over at her mother. Her father had returned to his side and entered the car with a flashlight he had taken from the floor. He lunged toward their mother and struck her in the forehead with the flashlight. She turned toward the girls.

"Please, baby, do something," the mother begged of Hope.

Anna's heart sank. She looked over at Hope, who was still crushed in the middle of the other two, clutching both their hands. Their horror-filled eyes had tears violently flowing down their faces. With terror-stricken grief, Anna unlocked the door, pulled the handle and jumped out. She ran opposite of the bay, toward a dark, wooded area. Her heart raced as her little legs carried her as fast as they could. All she knew to do was run.

"Git back here, Anna!" her father warned.

"No, Daddy, no—I just wanna go home!"

He lurched toward her. After a few feet and out of breath, he fell to his knees. Watching his seven-year-old daughter run toward the woods, he ran his fingers through his hair and clenched his fists.

"Come back here, little Annie." His demand turned into a des-

perate plea.

Placing his hands over his face, he tried to hide the tears oozing from his eyes. Anna stopped. She turned around and looked at her father on the ground. She had never noticed his appearance like this before. His black hair gleamed. It was so shiny that she thought for a moment she could see a slight reflection of the moon. His worn clothes were loosely hanging from his flushed-red, thin frame. His flaccid state reminded her of the homeless man they passed every day on the main circle downtown. Her thoughts escaped to the moments when her father would come home after work, stumbling through the door. He would drop to his hands and knees, crawl, and chase the girls around the living room. Anna always loved to jump on his back and ride until they all tackled him to the floor. The mother loathed his return; he was always drunk. There would be endless questions, wondering . . . suspecting. The girls actually appreciated his return home. Regardless, the mother's peevish mood would anger him and the prized homecoming would always turn into huge fights. Anna shivered.

The other girls remained in the car, all silent. While they stared at Anna and her father, their mother got out and walked over to him. With a slight trace of blood trickling down her face, she placed her arms around his shoulders and whispered in his ear.

"Baby, let's git home. I'll make some coffee."

Anna watched her parents hug. She walked over and kneeled in front of her mother. As she spoke to her father, she took her faded black shirt and wiped the blood from her mother's forehead. Carefully wiping away the blood, she looked deeply into her mother's eyes.

"Daddy, can we go home now?"

40

Headman

Adam Forrester



Inside Limits

Joseph Francavilla

Tacked to the wall,
the art print of "The Last Supper"
fades from sunlight
washing through the upstairs window
with the breathtaking view
only the visiting artist noticed.
It measures my life, vanishing ambition,
by the dissolving colors.

Once, in my car long ago, a girl asked me
to take off my watch because
"It ticks too loud."
It's still too loud at night now.
In the dark the luminous dial
hangs on the doorknob.
The insistent secondhand
sweeps away my birthdays.

On the shelves crammed with unread books
obsolete pink and tan computer cards
stolen from my defunct life among machines
mark my limits.

Seen through v's of discarded indoor antennas
v's drift against the always slate-gray sky—

then disappear.

Their choreographed wingdance displays
the perfect harmony of form and function
that Da Vinci tried to model—

and failed—

reminding me of his last words

and of all the books

which will never be read

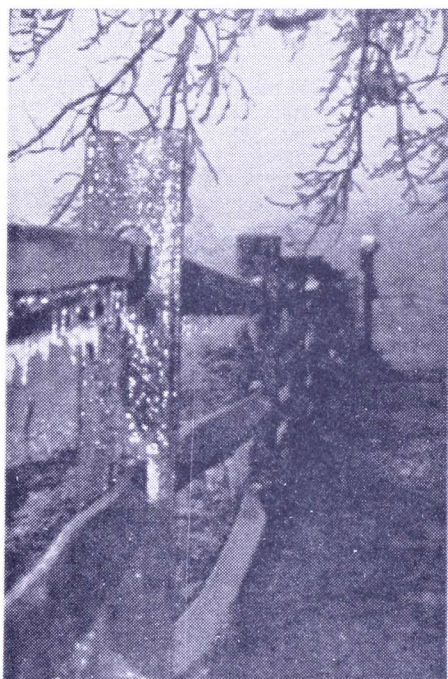
and all the poems

which will never be written

and how much will never be done

Icicle Fence

Nicole Strickland



*Medicine**for W.H. Auden*Ray Malmgren

Language boiled down to
essence –
where words effuse
meaning
and meaning
stirs
feeling
and feeling
ignites understanding:

"I, too."

Powerful medicine –
bitter or sweet,
strong or pleasing –

all depends on

those musings used
for ingredients:
how long they took to gather,
how hard they were stirred,
how long they were simmered

in the soul.

So Bitter –
it makes one disagree,
or mildly bitter –
just enough
to give a dose of reality.

So Sweet –
it sickens with feigned
ecstasy,
or slightly sweet –
just enough
to remind of love and loyalty.

For the Birds

Jake Patrick

Bird Story One: These were pigeons, and I don't know how they died. There were a lot of them in this huge parking lot—probably six or seven. All dead. All dead on that day, and dappled like clouds. I guess someone poisoned them, or maybe a kid with a BB gun was exhibiting behavior that would manifest itself later in life as a domestic homicide, or an inclination for S&M (he'll be a top). Maybe he'll just need a hug, though.

We were there because of this band that Mara wanted to see: And On That Day... She was friends with the singer, Tye. Tye is a hardcore singer in a hardcore band. Hardcore is a scene. In the scene, white kids get really pissed off and play loud, abrasive music while fighting air—i.e., dancing. The scene touts unity and fraternity as its anchors, but the drummer had a Confederate flag painted across the bass drum, and even though most of the guys wear girl's jeans, they usually hate faggots. It's not ironic. It's the uniform. When I described the scene as self-indulgent one time, Mara and Tye rolled their eyes. I was glad when the bass player's mom caught him drunk a few too many times, because he was never replaced and I didn't have to go to anymore of their shows.

She wanted to get her cigarettes out of the car and I had the keys, so I walked with her to the parking lot in back. It was well-lit and spacious. The asphalt was warm with the summer night, and black. There weren't many cars since most of the kids inside got dropped off. I handed her the keys to unlock the door, and she got the cigarettes from the armrest. As she was standing, I put

my arm on the open door and trapped her. I stood looking at her. My eyebrows were raised a little, like I was dazed or just stupid—supplicant is a better choice. My eyebrows were supplicant.

"So, what do you think? Do you want to go somewhere?"

"Mm," she thought pensively. "Roll Me Over and Bang Bang Bang is playing in a few minutes."

"Yeah, but that band is so fucking dumb."

"Sure, but a bunch of people are going to Tye's house after that. I want to stick around." She gently put her hand on my arm as if to put it aside and walk past.

"I think I'm gonna get of here."

Her eyes took on a pointed but distant look as her brows raised and her jaw tightened. "All right. I'll get a ride with somebody, okay?"

I was nodding while she was walking back, putting her cigarettes into her purse. I jogged ahead of her and faced her, stopping our walk. She took a deep breath and her shoulders dropped as she exhaled it, waiting. I kissed her on the cheek.

"All right, I'll see you later." She hugged me with one arm in a friendly way and stepped by. Once she rounded the building and was out of sight, I walked back to the car. My breathing got heavy and short, and I ran at a wooden fence in front of the car, kicking the shit out of it, then punching it. The wood was flimsy and the whole structure wobbled. I got a couple of splinters in my knuckle, but the blood felt good, like the sweat forming on my face and under my arms. I went to the car and sat in the driver's seat, feet on the ground outside. One of those pigeons was nearby, so I sat examining it, panting. It was dappled various shades of gray and a spot of brown on the keel. Its body was intact, but its wings were held in tight like it was paralyzed. The head and beak were

stretched out, gaping, amazed at its own death, frightened that it was forgotten and that its throat was going to fill with flies. Some of its feathers were ruffled so that the down poked through in places, but all of them were there. The street-lit, warm evening and the adrenaline in the air drew my imagination out, but I couldn't make the pigeon get up and walk again.

Bird Story Two: Annie loved him. She really loved him. She put a number 1 in front of his name in her cell phone so that it was always at the top of the phonebook. His calls had a special ring, and graphics. She called him first a lot of the time, especially on the weekends. He'd always been good with his hands, and he spent a lot of time fixing things around his house on the weekends. Sometimes they'd host parties at his place on Friday or Saturday nights, but Annie would eventually go back to her apartment because she had a dog. By the time she got all the way across town, her buzz would wear off and she'd be too tired to drive back.

Mike was in a master's program at the state university nearby—secondary education—and he subbed for a high school whenever they needed him. In January, on MLK day weekend, he flew to Chicago for an educator's conference. He kissed her at the metal detector, and she waited until she couldn't see him anymore. He looked back, smiled, waved before he turned the final corner out of her sight. He'd be gone from Thursday until Tuesday. He accidentally forgot his phone charger. Why didn't he buy another one? They're twenty five bucks. He'd be home in a couple of days. There was always e-mail. He was right, of course. Annie thought it would be nice to clean his house before he got home, so she used her key and spent her whole Sunday there.

JoJo played in the back yard, wagging his tail. She found an empty Budweiser bottle tucked in the crevice between the couch and the living room wall. Sticking to the side was a long blonde hair, most likely their friend Beth's. Annie knew Beth through Mike. They'd been friends since high school, and they'd known the same people since high school. They'd never truly hung out until they were in a class together two semesters back and decided to form a study group at a coffee shop with a couple of other students from the class. Now Beth was invited to all their parties, and she had lunch with them frequently. Annie liked Beth. She was funny, and would call Mike out on his bad jokes and the way he danced like he had shovels for feet. In all the gatherings at his house, at some point he'd stepped on both of their toes in the living room, sending either woman, either time, to the couch with laughter.

Annie washed Mike's car, and picked him up from the airport in hers so that he'd be surprised. When they got to his place and they walked inside, he hugged her. She was beaming, dragging him room to room. They went to the driveway where his car had sat over the weekend. On the dark hood there were three chalky, dry spots of bird shit. Annie's face was full of disappointment, but Mike acted as though the droppings weren't there. He said thanks.

Bird Story Three:

Bird One

What should we do tonight?

Bird Two

I don't know. Something. I'm bored as hell with this nest-building crap.

Bird One

Tell me about it. How long has it been since we went to the Greyhound terminal?

Bird Two

The one down on eleventh?

Bird One

Yeah, dummy. The only one.

Bird Two

I don't know: five, six weeks?

Bird One

We should go tonight. Remember that chick? What's her name?

Bird Two

Francine.

Bird One

Yeah, Francine.

Bird Two

I still can't believe that one. You dog! You fucking dog!

Bird One

Ahaha, no shit. I've never met somebody who could do that with her cloaca. It's too bad you're nesting; I bet she's into that double-team, freaky-deaky shit.

Bird Two

Man, don't remind me. At least I got some aggression out though. That guy she was with—

Bird One

The red-tail?

Bird Two

Yeah, that asshole, trying to start shit like he's somebody important. He won't be back.

Bird One

Yeah, what a jerk. It's always the buzzards trying to lay claim.

Bird Two

Haha, tell it.

Bird One

All right then, let's go.

Bird Two

Okay, okay. Let me pack out the nest with this receipt, and we'll jet before Martha gets back from the park.

Bird Story Four: This one was good. There were lots of colorful pictures of birds from the Audubon Society, and fascinating captive breeding techniques. Falconers developed the techniques, and it is partly thanks to them that the peregrine falcon was taken off the endangered species list in 1999.

Did you know that ornithologists actually used to shoot and kill the birds they admired so much? They'd shoot them, stuff them, and mount them somewhere for observation. It was the best way of studying them up-close, they figured.

There were no girls in this story.

To Be Anywhere Else

J.E. Grisamore



*Fragmented**The Venus de Milo***Amber Floyd**

Yorgos found me

Buried at Melos

A statue

Immortalizing

Feminine monstrosity

I was Lavinia

To Titus Andronicus

A victimized, armless amputee

Robbed of speech

Set in stone

The French rechristened me

The goddess of love

La victime impétueux¹

Near perfect, so

Stark, mute, and still

They tried to correct me

Affixed countless arms

Until Louis XVIII

Made his decree

Ne touchez pas²

Now I am the idealized woman

Dependent

Silent

Objectified

A model of feminine stoicism

¹ The impetuous victim

² Do Not Touch

Winter Haiku

Nancy Moore

Perched crow at sunset
Glow like an ember, then fades
Slowly into night.

First frost has vanished,
Yet its kiss has left behind
Blushing maple trees.

Of this I am sure:
Beneath this frozen river
A current pulses.

Lovely worn driftwood
Hesitates against the shore,
Restless, uncertain.

High atop this hill
The chiming of distant bells,
Stolen by the breeze.

*Nap*Sydney Lanier

dense, waking in the afternoon, head cocked to one side,
i mentally attempt to propel this
enormous bulbous thing my body has become
that i still try to convince myself is beautiful;
the best i can do is whale comma beached –
you know, when it's been there for two days
and a group of well-meaning but pretentious
early twenties activists come and roll
it into the tide.
i just want to pee.
i tend to loll in this limbo where i just want it
out and over with and then i'll put bows in her hair
or buy him a baseball bat
or whatever it is i'm going to do. and then
i stroke the skin, stretched
and realize that we will never be closer than this.
it is completely reliant on me and, at this
point, i am completely reliant on it.
i am the nurturer with every amino acid i can muster.
and then, what if i'm a royal screw up?
i plant myself on two feet i know are swollen –
probably beyond recognition – and wonder when or if
it's damaging to call it it. mike said it meant i
didn't love it and i cried for an hour.

it wasn't until a week later i realized it was a joke.

it's still not funny.

i'm waddling across the blue carpet when i pass a window
and see that the sky has let itself go
on my front yard. this, of all things,
makes me laugh.

Toil and Trouble

Becky Davis



*Ginger Cookies*Sydney Lanier

the grandmother's eyes never focused on fault
she wasn't mine by birth or blood
but one borrowed from down the street
left childless and widowed by long-passed wars
she had boundless love for all that she met
there were special cookies i gobbled greedily
and lemonade i turned my smug little nose up to
what do you want to be, she'd ask
a painter, a pilot, a builder of skyscrapers?
i shook my head with the intensity only
a seven year old could muster
i'm going to take pictures.
she nodded and smiled, handing another cookie
to the greedy little molars i called mine
but she never looked at my camera.
and i never took good pictures.

Committed

Kenny Toole

You were the first thing I thought of when
I woke, the last before I went to bed,
and at least eighteen times in between.

It was a passing fancy at first,
but soon I started to adore your flavor.
Simply running across your sweet scent
on the street made me desire you.

I even enjoyed the whole process -
unwrapping, opening, insertion, and ignition -
smoke penetrating deep down into my lungs
then slowly exhaling.

It is amazing how fast the years flew by,
you and I, together. We celebrated
the good times and mourned the bad.

Now, lying in my bed,
hooked to this machine, I know our
relationship must end, but I want just
one more taste of your delightful death.

Birth of Attis

Brandi Epps



Singed Caterpillar

Amber Floyd

There is a certain feminine expectation, cultivated by classic Hollywood movies like *Sabrina*, which is attached to a summer abroad in Europe that can commonly be referred to as: "the butterfly effect." In these movies, an American female generally travels to a European country, and after the duration of a season (or a full year) she returns to her family completely transformed from an ordinary American girl into an extraordinary sophisticate-slash-woman. As late as June 2005, Hollywood released another film which perpetuated this expectation called *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. In this movie, it is not one but in fact four girls who experience a maturing season. However, only one of these girls travels to Europe.

Lena, who is characterized as the shy and conservative friend of the group before her summer abroad, returns from her Mediterranean excursion to Greece feeling liberated. Her physical transformation includes a switch from carefully restrained to free-flowing hair, button-up Oxford shirts paired with slacks to off-the-shoulder linen tops paired with matching bohemian skirts, and—perhaps the least shocking of all—no apparent make-up usage to coral-colored lips and mascara-blackened eyelashes. Ergo, Lena's formulaic European makeover is complete.

While her other friends are forced to grow up as well—Tibby meets a girl with leukemia who challenges her Militant and Misunderstood persona, Carmen comes to terms with the father who abandoned her for his new, W.A.S.P.-approved family, and

Bridget learns that recklessness can result in permanent consequences at a soccer camp in Mexico—only Lena experiences the caterpillar-turned-butterfly effect. The inference of this detail, of course, is that while people change as a reaction to external complications anywhere, Europe specifically provokes women into adopting a new, more daring look. Perhaps this phenomenon is due to Europe's hoard of world-renowned fashion capitals (Milan, Paris, and London). Regardless of the source of this influence, Europe's chrysalis reputation stands.

As I prepared for my own European excursion, a six week trip to Oxford, England in mid-June of 2005, I concentrated on minimizing the rigors of travel (dehydration, jet lag, and culture shock) and created a budget at which my financial backers could not balk. While I had seen *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* earlier that month, the psychological Trojan horse of the butterfly effect was dormant in my mind while I carefully rolled and packed my clothes, sandwiching my books in between their freshly laundered folds, into two moderately sized black suitcases. In fact, for the first four weeks of my stay in Oxford, I was preoccupied with beating the freakish heat wave that plagued the historic university town.

My mornings in Oxford began with the ritual slathering of SPF 50 sunscreen onto my UV-abused skin and ended with the attempt to contort my limp, coarse hair into a smooth pony-tail. On one particular Sunday morning, as I found myself once again gazing into the expansive mirror that ran the full-length of one wall in my Spencer House bedroom, abjectly contemplating the severe hairstyle that had been exposing the greasy skin of my sunscreen-laden, Frankenstein monster-like forehead for weeks, I turned to my roommate and blurted: "*I need a freaking haircut!*"

In that moment, the psychological Trojan horse released its hidden trap door and the daydream of the European transformation flooded my mind. A rolodex of images flashed through my imagination, featuring women like Shelby Lynne, Melissa Etheridge, Liz Phair, and Juliette Lewis; you might know them better as the “Rocker Chicks.” I became obsessed with finding a local salon that would be able to give me “Rocker Chick” hair without an appointment. I was so manic, in fact, by the prospect of cutting loose from my conservative image that I set out that morning to turn myself, a sedate (if, admittedly, a bit plump) caterpillar, into an audacious butterfly and managed to induce makeover madness in my compatriots as well.

We hit our first snag as my friends and I perused the posted salon hours at the first salon we found. Apparently, like salons back home in the States, the hair salons of Oxford, England are closed on Sundays. We resigned ourselves to comparing four salons—based upon their posted prices, hours of operation, and other rare amenities (like air conditioning)—and chose one that not only had the lowest prices but gave an additional student discount to patrons with student identification cards as well. They also offered a variety of manicures, air-conditioning (hooray!) and something called a Thera-Cut. I was determined to learn the Oxfordian definition of luxury and pampering the next morning at this salon as soon as we finished our morning class.

The next day dawned, as usual, at 4 AM, but I remained in bed until four hours past the rising of the English sun. I was impatient in class as my anticipation mounted and barely contained my excitement as we began, once again, to trek towards our chosen salon. The second snag to our plan came in the form of peer pressure. Several of my housemates urged me to make a drastic

change at the salon as we left the house, but I was determined to maintain a sense of pragmatism while I gave into the desire to change my appearance. I refused to lose my head and adopt a look that other people deemed fierce while I considered it ridiculous (a tragically frequent occurrence in salons throughout the world). I was already rehearsing what I would say to the stylist in my head and girding my will against any of her potential enticements and manipulations.

Too often in the States, when a woman enters a hair salon and asks for a stylist's professional opinion about a particular cut or style, she receives flattery and false assurances. The American hair stylist can be described as possessing a "can-do" attitude. Regardless of the amount of product they will have to put in your hair, or the amount of time they must waste taming your hair with a blow dryer, they are determined to give you, the customer, what they think you want. However, when it is physically impossible—even with the vast tricks of their trade—to provide their customers with a particular hairstyle, these stylists refuse to admit defeat (to their customers, at least). In other words, American stylists will lie in order to get your patronage.

I have often fallen victim to their manipulations. As a result, no matter how many times I have asked them to give me a flattering hair style—with body and movement, not height—I always face the same result in the mirror: middle-aged helmet-hair that adds at least three inches to my height. Therefore, as I neared the salon, I couldn't restrain the chill of trepidation that ran down my spine. Would Oxford prove the chrysalis reputation of Europe true, or would I be plagued once again with horrific hair?

Fortunately, I can report that I was not given a neurotic complex over the result of my haircut. Unlike American stylists, the

woman who cut my hair in Oxford listened to what I wanted—shape and movement that defies the nature of my fine, limp hair and the preservation of as much length as possible—and was straightforward with me when she answered my questions.

"I've been growing my hair out for a few years now," I began, "and I haven't had a haircut in almost . . . two years."

"Two years?" she gasped.

"Yeah, two years," I continued, "so I know that I probably have a lot of split ends."

"Mmmm. Right," she murmured.

"So, obviously, I'd like to get rid of those, but I also want to maintain as much length as possible *because* I've been growing it out for so long," I wheedled.

"Yeah, okay," she replied, finger-combing my damp hair. Catching my eye in the mirror, she asked, "You just want a trim, then?"

Shaking my head slightly, I explained what I wanted: long-layers with a hint of bangs, or fringe, to soften my forehead and make wearing my hair in a ponytail—which scrapes the hair back from my face in a severe manner—more attractive. She met my gaze in the mirror and told me she couldn't do it.

"You see," she explained, "with hair as fine as yours, the best thing you can do to thicken it up would be a blunt cut. If I add layers, even long layers, it's just going to thin your hair out even more. What I suggest, since you want to maintain the length and get rid of your split ends, is a blunt cut with our Thera-scissors."

"What are those?" I asked.

"They're heated scissors that cauterize the hair shaft as it cuts it. It's great for sealing split ends and tends to thicken hair up a bit,

too," she answered.

Excellent, I thought to myself, nearly rubbing my hands together in the process. After considering the matter for a few moments, I agreed. I resigned myself to a haircut that amounted to a basic trim but comforted myself with the idea that my hair would be split end-free and less drab than it was before. I would be a singed caterpillar rather than a fully formed butterfly, but I was satisfied that I'd avoid becoming a clichéd stereotype (that of the foolish American who returns home with an haute couture haircut that is fashionably eccentric but grossly unattractive). My stomach turned over in horror, however, as an archaic-looking machine was wheeled over to us by another stylist.

Apparently, Thera-scissors resemble the boxy crash-carts and EKG machines that are most commonly found in the hospital. In fact, as the stylist picked up two metallic-looking probes that were hooked into the machine, and flipped the dial up to a number I couldn't quite make out on the digital display, I was reminded of the defibrillator wands that heart surgeons use to shock a transplanted heart into beating. Ridiculous images of electro-shock therapy played out in my mind as she brought the probes closer to my head, and I squeezed my eyes shut against them. My hair was so long that I had to stand to have the majority of it cut, and so I stood in her cubicle, my nervous fingers biting into the countertop in front of me as I refused the offer of a drink from another stylist, quaking in terror from the baseless fear that the combination of any liquid with the electrified rods, which were currently moving in and out of my hair, would short-circuit my brain.

As the singeing continued, I began to compare my Oxfordian salon experience to those I'd previously had in American salons. I

began to enumerate their apparent similarities and differences, pros and cons.

1. **PRO**—English stylists are straightforward and helpful.
(American stylists cannot be trusted entirely.)
2. **CON**—Because of the nature of the British Sterling Pound, prices (even those that are discounted) are incredibly inflated at English salons. Therefore, even the simplest procedures cost double the amount an American salon would charge.
3. **PRO**—English stylists seem more concerned with styling hair according to its nature rather than with manipulating hair with styling products. They are simple and casual, and this is reflected in the Oxford community by their predilection for natural, product-free styles.
4. **CON**—The British concept of service is limited/sparse.
Whereas the American concept of service dictates that stylists should offer amenities that reflect their prices (a value-packed service which includes pampering, free of extra charge), the English concept of service seems to dictate that stylists should exhibit a pared down, take-it-or-leave-it approach to the salon experience (customers get what they pay for—nothing more and nothing less). Therefore, rather than packing value into every dollar/pound a customer spends, and thereby padding the service, British prices seem even more inflated to the customer because they only cover the simplest form of the service.

Ultimately, throughout the course of my haircut I determined that the definition of concepts like "service" and "bargain" are defined by the beholder of the service or bargain. As a lower-middle class American woman, I demand the most out of my money I want to get the best service, which includes expertise and a frank attitude from my stylist, as well as the aesthetic luxuries of a fancy salon, for the lowest, most fair price. In Oxford, people are more relaxed about their appearance. They are driven by comfort and practicality for the most part. I had never considered myself to be superficial or spoiled (pamper-driven, if you will) before, but after getting my hair cauterized in England I realized that it is just the American in me that expects a little bit extra. My appearance is important to me, and I enjoy the little luxuries that American salons provide (a simple scalp massage while your hair is washed, having your hair dried for free, etc.). But as I accepted these simple truths, I was forced to ask myself: What image was I trying to achieve?

Was I trying to fit in or stand out?

While I am a liberal thinker, I tend to lead a very conservative life. What did I really want from this supposed makeover? Did the butterfly symbolize beauty or rebellion to me? I was unsure of the answers to these questions as I left the salon, and managed to feel both satisfied and disappointed at the same time. There is an image I would like to achieve for myself, but only for the right reasons. At week four, I was ready for a change but wasn't sure what that change should be. Was I hoping for an external transformation that reflected my internal alteration or vice versa?

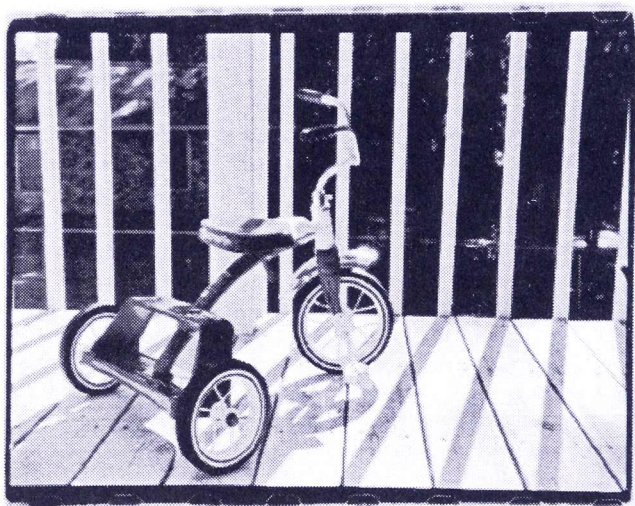
Coming back from England, I spent a long time reflecting on what I'd been hoping to achieve when I sought the European transformation. Was I trying to escape a reputation—that of an

androgynous bookworm—or simply rebelling against the social constraints that have prevented me from doing something different, something daring, in the past? That Oxford salon inspired me; it forced me to look at myself as more than just a challenged caterpillar. I realized that the only power peers, or the general public, can exert on me is the power I give them. Therefore, when I finally made it home, I did something I've wanted to do for a long time: this singed caterpillar finally dyed. Now, whenever I look in the mirror, the auburn strands that fall in my face remind me of Oxford. And, true to form, I feel liberated. How's that for a European transformation?

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Memento Mori

Becky Davis



The Moment of Life

Melanie K. Greenwood

I usually never travel down any alley, dark or not. But this one was different. I had, so far, spent my afternoon shopping with my husband. Shopping for clothes. Shopping for gifts. Shopping for the sake of shopping. Shopping, shopping, shopping. It was a beautiful day.

It was late afternoon, warm and sunny. My husband had gone into a convenience store to get some gum when I discovered this cove in the metropolis. Just as his hand touched the door, he turned, looked at me with wrinkled brow, and requested, *Wait right there. Will you?*

He had not seen what I saw.

It was not a dark alley though it was shadowed by the looming buildings. The alley spilled a light I had never seen before. There was just enough to call me in. The light begged me to discover it.

It called me. It led me. The light wanted me.

When I crossed the line, my heart beat one hard, chest-quaking beat and forced my breath out of my lungs. That line, the distinct concrete sidewalk onto asphalt driveway line. This was the kind of line kids jump over singing, "Step on a crack, break your mother's back." This was not a through-alley; rather, it ended with a foreboding, tall, brick wall. The kind of wall you always see TV criminals trying to climb to escape arrest.

The alley looked like every alley I had looked down. Looked, for I never walked. Rising up on each side were the dingy brick walls of apartment buildings. The blue sky reflected off each win-

dow; behind the glass, there were curtains, flower pots, aloe plants, and ugly trinkets. Each window had a secret, a family's life.

There was an extra window in the building on my left, the very last window. It was beautiful stained glass decorated with many shades of blue. There was nothing on the other side of it. It did not have curtains or flowers. There was not a kitchen sink, or table or walls or doorway like the others. It led to nothing. I looked into it for the heaven it resembled. It was alive and held a secret I wanted.

Across from this thing of beauty was the alley trash, a dumpster overfull with people's unwanted and leftovers. It was graffitied with dripping red paint: *I Have Eight Lives Left!!* There were two sets of stairs leading to it, one from the fire escape and one from a basement. A dove cooed, perched on the ledge of a window. Nestled close to the wall was a large, soft-looking pillow with a brilliant white pillowcase, sitting on a woolen blanket with threads of gold.

I looked to the start of the alley. It was miles away and filled with unsuspecting people who were walking and driving and going on with their busy lives. The noises of the bustling city were muffled, like elevator music. The footsteps and voices of the people melded perfectly with the taxis, busses and cars, creating music to soothe my soul in these strange surroundings.

The smell of fresh, homemade bread began to fill the alley. Nearly at once, my eyes became heavy and my knees weak. I looked to the pillow, laying my head on the soft feathers, and pulled the golden blanket to my chin. I closed my eyes and felt a deep, heavy sleep taking over my body.

I dreamed of the wall opening to a meadow with perfect grass,

spotted with little fragrant flowers. A cloudless blue sky surrounded the land. The sound of the ocean crashing against a rocky coast filled the air. As I walked, my feet never touched the ground. I began to run. Faster. And faster. And faster. The grass waved in my wind. I tried to reach the meadow's edge. But the closer I came to the cliff, the farther away it moved.

Suddenly, the meadow dropped into a deep, dark, tight hole. I fell, riding the hole like a playground slide. Just as suddenly, I landed gently, back on the pillow in the alley.

My eyes opened wide. The alley was dark now. The sky was dark, too. And so was every other window except the one with the beautiful glass.

My eyes adjusted slowly to the strange light that surrounded the window and the wall. That window let out the light that had brought me down this alley. It shone with a light more beautiful than any day's sunshine.

I stood up and looked again to the street. I saw nothing, as if the street I had been standing on only a few hours before had disappeared. I walked towards the emptiness and felt a tickle on my hand. I looked down and saw the sleeve of my sweater unraveling, one string at a time. With each step forward, another string fell slowly to the ground, governed by a gravity that existed only in this strange alley. Each little string floated to the ground, slowly rocking back and forth, as a feather would.

One by one they dropped and formed, from each separate piece one long rope. As I walked away from the beautiful window, the rope moved closer to the brick wall. At the moment I reached the line of alley and sidewalk, the rope suctioned to the wall. I stood. I stared at the one string still clinging to my T-shirt, then at the wall.

I picked up the rope and began to pull myself down the alley. Each step was heavy and labored. I was walking through thick mud. I had to pull myself forward with the rope. I felt my feet leave the ground.

I was floating, hovering towards the brick wall with only the rope to keep me from ascending into the sky. I reached the wall with great, exhausting effort. I touched it and my feet landed back on solid ground. The wall was warm, as if the sun that had now set, leaving behind its warmth in the bricks. I looked again to my window. It was shining brighter, now unlatched. I walked to it and placed my hand around its edge to open it.

I could hear a new sound now. A voice calling my name from inside.

Lily! Lily! the voice beckoned. *Come back to me.* I could hear it calling me in.

I struggled to move towards to the window. It was opening for me. Slowly, it opened outward, revealing a soft, blue carpet. Just inside I could see a clean, wooden table with three legs. Sitting on the table was a large book with bright white pages. Next to the book stood a feather pen and an inkwell.

Oh, God, please! Lilith! Someone call 9-1-1!

I turned my head and saw a bearded man standing by me. I reached my hand to him. I tried to move to him. He whispered, *Not yet, my love.* I collapsed at his feet.

I struggled to open my eyes. I looked up and my husband was standing over me. He had my arm in a tight grip, petting my cheek, with tears in his sea-blue eyes, as his bearded lip quivered.

The sun was too bright for my eyes. I closed them. I could feel a pain in my head.

The Dwarf Stallsweeper

(Variation Inspired by Koch's "Variation on a Theme by William Carlos Williams")

Joseph Francavilla

so much depends
upon

a dwarf stall
sweeper

smear'd with horse
droppings

beside the pissed
stallions.

Temporary Release

Kenny Toole

Smoke tapers towards
the ceiling over
his graying scalp
from a freshly lit cigar.
He leans back in his
rocking chair on the
back porch and takes
a small sip of
scotch and soda while
watching the pale
yellow crescent moon
climb over the horizon –
momentarily relaxed
before waking up in an
eight by eight cubicle.

April

Nancy Moore

My child, with chubby fingers and stubby toes,
discovers life.

Her hands sink deep into the warm, brown sand
while she slyly steals a smooth, firm stone to her mouth,
rubbing its craggy texture against her tongue.

The September sun smoothes her blond hair
while the breezes toss her soft curls
about like girls at play.

From her elfin eye she spies a stately weed
beckoning her
come closer, then, upon kneeless legs, she
totters nearer, and there

Claims dominion over it and all nature . . . all with
one rosy hand of love.

What's the Worth of Words?

Sydney Lanier

"Sometimes when I look at you, I see all the beauty in the world; sometimes it doesn't come so easily."

These are the thoughts, the little things you say, that make me wonder if all the stuffed equations equal love. And what a horrid word love is! And what could that possibly mean? — I love the dog that hides behind the couch, the sheets fresh out of the dryer, and my new pen with ink that flows like a fountain but never puddles at the ends of words. And somehow, I still love you.

These are the thoughts I tuck in at night, right after the little girl with the dark hair and green eyes.

An Unspoken Separation

Sandra Shorey

I was only twenty-two when my first child was born; I chose an older OB/GYN because an experienced doctor made me feel safer. My labor was long and difficult, and after two hours of “pushing” in the delivery room, I was thankful when my son finally decided to make his appearance. I soon received a rude awakening. I thought that the crowning of a baby’s head was the most painful part of childbirth—I never considered the shoulders. As I winced and said, “Oh! That hurts!” the seasoned obstetrician replied, “Of course it hurts. You’re having a baby.” Although the man had witnessed the births of hundreds of babies, his callous remark was clear proof that he had never birthed shoulders.

I tried to remember this experience while sitting in my African American Literature class. As one of only three white women in a class of twenty or so, I realized that the stories we read were not my stories. I wanted to be careful not to make the kind of callous remarks that someone writes about years later. At times I find this carefulness distressing. I wish I could just talk plainly with my classmates and tell them how I feel. I wish they could talk plainly to me and tell me how they feel. I wish that we could somehow put an end to the tension that stays thinly veiled when we talk together. Dinah Maria Mulock Craik beautifully expressed what I long for in all my relationships:

O, the comfort—the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe
with a person,
Having neither to weigh thoughts,

Nor measure words—but pouring them right out—just as
they are—

Chaff and grain together,

Certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them—

Keep what is worth keeping—

And with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.

I have found, however, that life just isn't that way. The type of transparency and trust Craik describes is rare even in intimate relationships. It seems impossible in a classroom.

This tension, this avoidance of plain talk about racial issues, has dogged my journey since I was old enough to understand racism. I went to high school in Dallas, Texas, during the years of mandatory bussing. My locker mate was a smart, beautiful black girl. We were on amiable terms, but she was not my friend, nor I hers. An unspoken separation stood between us. That separation was never comfortable for me, but at that time it was not pressing enough to struggle over. I didn't consider myself a racist; I bore no ill will. I learned, though, that prejudice can be subtle.

Later I married and moved to New England, where time and distance separated me from the constant exposure to racial tension. No longer immersed in an environment of racial bias, I began to recognize subtle evidences of prejudice still lingering from my upbringing. As each bit came to light, I learned to reject it. I grew up—and, to the best of my ability, set aside racism in my own life.

A few years ago, I moved back to the South, and what I found upon my return has been troubling. Even now, long after mandatory bussing ended, the rumblings of racism are painfully evident. I feel a sense of helplessness in the face of deeply rooted bigotry; I realize that I cannot end racism. If change is to continue, though, it has to come from each of us as individuals. I want to be an

instrument of healing and change—I want to pick away at the unspoken separation.

My choice to take a class on African American Literature was a part of that purpose. Exposure to the writings of those African Americans who have made an impact on the history of this nation would help me understand the tensions that still exist. Little did I know what lay in store for me. The body of literature we read and the videotapes we watched touched me deeply. I found myself in tears on many occasions, overwhelmed by the atrocities that man commits against man.

The horror of slavery—particularly for women—is inescapable. The accounts of female slaves forced to stand naked on the auction block, reduced to mere chattel while prospective buyers weighed and measured, fondled and groped them, reached me at the deepest level. In a culture that highly esteems beauty, these words have an even greater impact. What we prize, female slaves mourned. I feel a sense of grief over the loss of dignity and wholeness that female slaves suffered.

Equally horrific, however, are the stories of women chosen specifically for their strong and sturdy bodies. These young women were chosen for their reproductive ability, forced to mate with other slaves in order to produce children. The idea of one human subjecting another human to the baseness of breeding is difficult to comprehend. Systematic and long-term rape became their daily employment. Their only choice was to yield or die. As a woman, my heart raises in violent protest against their suffering.

Motherhood should be a blessing, a deeply held bond. Slave mothers were frequently denied that blessing and bond. All the narratives relate the cruel and casual way that families were treated—separated by the whim of the slaveholders. My children are

precious to me; I cannot comprehend the agony of having them taken away. Slave narratives are replete with this agony; I am drawn in sympathy for the brave women who gave what little they could to convey a mother's love to their children. My nurturing spirit cries out against the devastation these families suffered.

Seven years after the birth of my first child, I was once again in a delivery room, but this time in a different town. I was once again attended by a seasoned obstetrician, Dr. Higgins, a kind and well-beloved small town doctor. He was soon to retire, after witnessing the births of over 2,000 babies. My husband and I had been blessed with two healthy, active sons, and the birth of our third child was imminent. When asked, we always said we just wanted a healthy baby and a safe delivery, but deep inside we hoped for a girl. When our baby arrived, Dr. Higgins said, "Meet your daughter." We were thrilled; our tears of joy flowed freely. We looked up and saw that our tender-hearted obstetrician was crying, too. Unlike our first obstetrician, he was able to share in our joy and the wonder of new life in spite of the fact that he had never given birth.

I want to be like Dr. Higgins. I am not black, but my white skin does not keep me from sharing in the pain that accompanies the human experience written in the slave narratives and continues in the form of racial bigotry. My heart grieves, too. My hope is that the elements of my life that align with those of my classmates will be the common bond that opens the lines of communication and becomes a part of the process of healing. I hope that we might, in some small way, pick away at the unspoken separation.

Drowned Son

Emily Stranger

To the mother sadly weeping
 And a father desolate
 Your child did not perish
 From drowning in the lake
 For Yeatsian daydreams
 Of whimsy poet schemes,
 Tell a different story
 Of the child you sit mourning

*Faeries stole your human child
 From the waters and the wild
 And with faery, hand in hand
 He was carried to faery land*

Where the heads of cold stone stand
 And mourners slowly pass,
 Walking past the wooden casket
 Of a life that flickered fast
 Where flowers and wooden crosses
 Signify our earthly losses
 Now, the stolen child laughs
 As he rides their faery vats

*For he left, your youthful child
 From the waters and the wild*

*And he waits now, patiently,
For the day when you and me
leave this world of weeping;
Carried away, to Faery land
With a faery, hand in hand*

Bare and Blind

Sandra Shorey

"The Emperor was accordingly undressed, and the rogues pretended to array him in his new suit; the Emperor turning round, from side to side, before the looking glass." – From "The Emperor's New Clothes" by Hans Christian Andersen

The further I go on in life, the more I'm convinced that we are best at deceiving ourselves. If others can spot the quirks in our personalities, why can't we? When making observations, recognizing in those around us their blatant frailties, we fail to realize that others are doing the same with us. Like the Emperor and his new clothes, we flaunt our flaws for the entire world to see, while ignoring what should be obvious.

For as long as I can remember, I have had a propensity towards digression. Copious amounts of minutiae stick with me, usually in the form of "how things came to be." When relating a story, I feel *compelled* to share that information. It's as if I can't quite decide what details are crucial to the story and what can be left out. I begin a story, wander around in the Wilderness of Detail until I forget what my point is, and then wonder how I got where I am in the tale.

I was blissfully unaware of this foible for a long time. I had hints of the frustration my meanderings caused my listeners, but couldn't quite grasp the cause. More often than not, it was my husband who bore the brunt of my detailing. He was quite adept

at enduring those forays, choosing to humor me rather than risk offending me. One day, when he was especially tired and pressed by his responsibilities, he lost his endurance. His face took on an expression I had rarely seen. He stopped me and said emphatically, "AND, SO . . . ?"

I thought he was just grumpy. Then one day I was talking with an acquaintance who was telling me about taking her first child off to college. I was interested because I, too, would soon be seeing my firstborn "leave the nest." I sat with rapt attention as she began the tale, but after a few minutes of detailed descriptions about how they loaded the car, which highways they chose, what they saw on the way, how they took a wrong turn, which street they took . . . no, it was another street . . . no, it was the first street, what the weather was like, what the buildings were like, what they had for lunch, what they had for dinner, what color the car was, *blah, blah, blah, blah, blah* . . . I felt my face arrange itself into an expression it rarely gets, and my brain exploded in exasperation (although, thankfully, no words came out), "AND, SO . . . ?"

Yes, you know what happened. I had that moment of awful epiphany—when I came face to face with my fault. Just like the Emperor when the little boy said, "But he has nothing on at all," my weakness was naked and exposed. It was painful—truly painful.

Since then, I have noticed that I am not alone. We all have flaws that we don't see. I am not sure why we are blinded to them. It could be that they developed over time and we are comfortable with them. Whatever the cause, I would think that most of us would prefer to be foible-free. The problem arises from the mechanism that blinds us in the first place. If we can't see them, how can we fix them? Part of the solution lies at the feet of those clos-

est to us.

In the film *Good Will Hunting*, a psychologist, Sean, describes the way he handled his wife's quirks to a young client, Will:

My wife used to fart when she was nervous. She had all sorts of funny little idiosyncrasies. (Laughing) She used to fart in her sleep—sorry I shared that with you. It was so loud it woke the dog up. She'd wake up and go, like, "Was that you?" I'd say, "Yeah." I didn't have the heart to tell her.

This response is, on the one hand, noble, good, and kind. We *do* need others to love us in spite of our weaknesses. On the other hand, though, I think we need others to be willing to go out on a limb and make us aware of things that we don't see. My husband, like Sean in the film, looks on my idiosyncrasies with amusement. They are part of what he finds "adorable" in me. I truly appreciate this—to a point—but if there is something I am doing that others must *endure*, or that might cause embarrassment, I would like to know.

If the Emperor had someone who was willing to risk the consequences, to lean over and say, "You know, Sire, I never knew you had a birth mark *there*," he would have been spared the embarrassment of walking through his kingdom *au naturel*. If our trusted companions cannot be trusted to level with us, we most likely will end up like him: bare and blind.

I am grateful that I came face-to-face with my flaw. I imagine that those around me are grateful, too. I'd like to say that I have overcome it. Honestly, I can't claim that victory. I am, at best, a recovering digressionist. I am learning to be proactive: as I begin to tell a story, I try to determine which parts are the grain and

which are the chaff. I am also trying to take visual cues: the eyes that glance at something over my shoulder, the suppressed yawn, the beginnings of a look of sheer panic . . . *But I digress. . .*

Straightjacket

Shawwna Farrell



Perfection

Melanie K. Greenwood

The credits are rolling, my hand is
Two inches away, and you are yet to
Hold it.

We are almost to your car, my arm is
Right here, and you are yet to
Take it.

The car door is open, my eyes lust,
My lips purse, but you are yet to
Touch me.

We are up the stairs, and my front door is
Just two steps away, but you are yet to
Kiss me.

Chest is tight.
Heart is racing.
Jaw is tight.
Mind is racing.

The door is shut.

My warm forehead rests against the inside

Of the cold door.

A smile creeps across my face as I stare at
Perfection in unattempted

Action.

The Bird Feeder

Sandra Shorey

A neighbor's feeder lures them—
Doves, finches, chickadees.
We watch and listen.

Doves perch on the fence, cooing.
Chickadees twitter, finches flutter—
Pleasant sights and sounds.

But overhead, another
Watches
And waits—

A silent *swoop*

A Quarter Pound of Chickadee,
McDove and
Filet of Finch.

The red-tail hawk's fly-through.

Ya want some *mice wi'* that?

The Wedding Chapel

Sydney Lanier

the chapel was most beautiful in the fall
he took me there often
to show me where i'd stand
each time i'd smile, standing a little taller
though my stature was nothing beside him

he said i was most beautiful in the spring
so always at odds with old sanctuary
i would never fit in those woods
but each time we'd visit
i'd leave a little piece of my heart
at the quaint altar

he told me the pieces would be recovered
recollected
someday. he held my hand and brushed
a little dust off my shoulder.

now that it's winter
i'm flipping through photographs
the smiles so bright against the dimly lit
face of the pastor behind
the tall blond man eyeing the cake in the corner
brushes a petal off his shoulder
his right hand, cupped, crudely tosses

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bits of red confetti behind him

a small tear brings on the spring.

Traveling Into Self-Awareness

Kathy L. Honea

One week left. The anticipation of traveling into one of the oldest countries in the world was growing by the minute. The journey of discovering another culture was invading my thoughts daily as I prepared for a three-week, study-abroad trip to Oxford, England. And, coming from the Deep South of Columbus, Georgia, I had many questions regarding these new people, this alien way of life.

When the day finally came for our arrival at London Gatwick Airport, our small group of Columbus State University students exited the plane, each in a sluggish state of mind. Even with a sore behind, swollen limbs, and burning, tired eyes, my eagerness to explore England was still well alive in my mind. I was ready for an adventure, regardless of the zombie-like state I was in.

After waiting for the double-decker bus—what the English refer to as a *coach*—I was finally able to have my first conversation with, who I thought at that time, an English woman. As soon as I sat down beside her, I was eager to start a conversation. My first glance received a warm smile, and I knew I was in for a delightful chat with my new friend. As I pondered ice-breakers, she politely turned to me and said, “You must have just come in from a long flight.”

“Yes, almost nine hours,” I said, trying to hold back a fresh spark of energy.

After about five minutes of discussing healthcare in England, I learned that the woman was actually from the United States and

had been living in England for five years with her English husband. Still, my first impression of England was a positive one. I felt confident in my ability of getting to know new people without any cultural barriers in the way.

After a week in Oxford, and many attempts at communicating with the locals, I found myself becoming very judgmental of the stiff upper-lip and snub responses. Many times, I walked down Banbury Road in Summertown to the local Marks & Spencer (one of their most popular markets) and tried desperately to make eye contact, but each time I failed miserably. *What was it? Why was it so hard for people to look me in the eye and say hello?* The lack of connection with others reminded me of Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. One of the major themes in this particular book focused on the lack of connection felt among the people in Clarissa Dalloway's world. Over and over again, I contemplated the fact that something was wrong with these people. In the South, when a person fails to look another in the eye, he or she is considered untrustworthy. *Are these people untrustworthy?* How horrible it must have been for Woolf to have lived in an unloving society, a concern that controlled my rationale as I learned about another culture. The more I thought about it, the more desperate I became to find out about this inability to connect with others that Woolf so frantically fought.

The more I judged, the more I became isolated within my own mind. I escaped into my own world to seek the answers that I thought would solve the problems of either miscommunication or misjudgment. I am, after all, a Southerner. *What do these people know about me?* What do they think about my constant smiling and eye contact, things many people have come to know as marks of Southern charm from the Old South?

As the days hustled on, the more I became contemplative about my own way of life and who I really am. Instead of trying to figure out why they didn't want to get to know me as much as I wanted to get to know them, I started opening my eyes to other, fellow human beings—other people who were not like me, but who were *different*. My journey of discovering another culture quickly became a journey of discovering myself. I turned to isolation in order to evaluate my own actions instead of evaluating others. By the third, and last, week of our trip, I felt more of an appreciation for another culture, more so than mere damnation. I came to England to learn about other people, but, in the end, I learned something about myself. I was judging others negatively before getting to know them, just like others judge Southerners by what they see on television. Whew, a hard pill to swallow!

I did, in fact, learn a lot about the English. They, too, live day-to-day, working, shopping, conversing with loved ones, and just basically getting through life in the safest and happiest manner possible. I loved seeing people outdoors, in the park, walking wherever they needed to go; I loved the healthy way in which they ate and seeing people walk down the streets in their business attire, munching on fruits; I loved the simple way the women dressed, with very little make-up and simple, comfortable clothing and shoes. I also admired the many, small vehicles and fewer drivers using cell phones than what you see in the States. There were, of course, things I didn't like. But most of the things I didn't care for were things I wasn't accustomed to in my own lifestyle. And as I witnessed it . . . lived it, I learned that the differences in our lifestyles were *okay*. They were not shady people because they didn't look me in the eyes and cater to my need to communicate with them. That is just something they don't do. As I found out

later, from others I did actually converse with in the pubs we visited, it was considered a little offensive to look someone in the eye. They just don't do it. They go about their business and talk with strangers only when it is absolutely necessary to do so.

The overall experience of studying abroad has improved my outlook on life. It has given me the ability to evaluate my own behavior and thoughts when learning about a different culture. I feel that everyone should visit another country and open their minds to the differences in each other's way of life. And, instead of making judgments on those differences, embrace them and learn. Never again will I snub a foreigner, judging them on being different, nor will I harass them for my own comfort and curiosity.

*Rage*Adam Forrester



Firewood

Luke Eden

the sharp cold stings my lips,
shocking my lungs.
a cloud of warm moisture rich breath
erupting into the morning.

the polished handle of the Axe,
rubbed smooth by time,
glides thought my hands like a liquid.
the wood springs apart,
anxious to be separated from itself.

the shattered remnants join
the growing stack of oak and pine
a gnarled stump, twisted with knots
stands stalwart before me

a dull thud as the Axe lands
a soft gentle sort of creaking
a small breach appears in the wood.

the Axe sinks deep within the growing breach.
lodged inside the log, immobile and powerless.
held fast by strong entwining wooden fingers,
the cold metal, so menacing and unstoppable
now in a prison of it's own making.

a battered iron wedge settles solidly into the fissure
driving the wedge deep into the heart of the oak
the wood forced apart with a shocking metallic clash
two halves of the log suddenly free, jump apart

the Axe falls clumsily to the ground,
it's majestic arch and perfection of form gone
it seems to flounders in the dirt,
lost without the guiding touch of my hands.

Home

Ray Malmgren

We come from forgotten places
like Shiloh and Mulberry Grove
with summer haze and familiar faces.

Dreams disguised in measured paces
on red clay paths to places called home;
we come from forgotten places.

Others come to escape their mazes
wishfully drive down pine-sentried roads
with summer haze and familiar faces.

Hope's dim glow in sunburned faces
with chicken and sweet tea from Joe's;
we come from forgotten places.

When others return to necessary races
we gather on porches that groan
with summer haze and familiar faces.

For only a moment we lift our gazes
wondering where the city folks roam.
We come from forgotten places
with summer haze and familiar faces.

The Quiet American

Jessica McCallister

Sitting in silence: it's absolutely fabulous, unabashedly underrated. Inside the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, I, strangely enough, found a spot to be alone. I, along with the twelve members of my group, dispersed immediately upon entering. Wandering from room to room, catching glimpses of Egyptian figurines and Asian pottery, I walked until I felt calm. It took a marble staircase and four more immense rooms, but I found it, this peace amongst the crowd.

A fantastically comfortable, blood-red, velveteen sofa beckoned to me. How beautiful—not so much the paintings, but the beauty as a whole—patrons moving calmly from one painting to the next, examining the Pissarros and Rossettis. *Wow*, I thought, *people actually doing what they should*.

Perhaps I should explain myself. I'd just fled from a rambunctious group of teenagers, flash cameras in hand, cell phones tuned to the song of the week, and conversations overpowering the echo-enhancing rooms. They were Asian, and with my limited knowledge of Asian language differentiation, I couldn't say from exactly where.

Standing there, listening to the loud, harsh voices of Asian and Italian tourists, I wondered why this, the centuries-old artwork, wasn't being appreciated. In the Egyptian room, I became quickly annoyed with the incessant talking of a young group of Asian tourists, who were taking flash pictures even though they aren't allowed to, and, although I don't speak any Asian languages, I

knew that what they were speaking loudly about was neither the beauty nor age of the sarcophagi. I also knew that I needed to leave before I had an all-too-stereotypical American breakdown.

So, in the Baroque room, I people-watched and was proud of those patrons who so gratefully appreciated what it was they got in, free of charge, to see. Around me was a calming sensory overload. My nostrils filled with the mixing perfumes of each passerby, and the museum had a strange aroma all its own, a variety of floor wax, cleaning supplies, and art. The wooden floors—for all I know, older than the United States—creaked with each passing onlooker. The creaks told a story, as if each room talked to the other, explaining the perils of the day.

And then it happened.

My ears turned to the direction from which I came, a subversive rumbling moving slowly towards me. Sharply, immediately, I realized that I was soon to be interrupted by a stampeding hoard of tourists. *What should I do?* My mind raced. *This must be what it feels like at the 'Running of the Bulls' in Pamplona*, I thought. I felt the energy, the ebbing tide of foreign voices moving slowly my way. Stay put. They'll be gone in no time.

And then it happened again.

God Save the Queen. No, literally, I heard "God Save the Queen" blaring from a cell phone in the next room. *Surely not; I must have been mistaken.* But then it rang again, and its British-accented owner boomed his voice through the speaker. *Surely, they can't be serious.*

Weeks before the trip, it was more or less drilled into our unappreciative American heads, the importance of conforming to British culture. "They are quieter," we were told, "more reserved." We complied, for the most part. (It's like those bad

habits—so easy to reprimand but difficult to totally submerge.) Did no one else get the memo?

No. No, they didn't.

It was in my second quest for silence that I found myself on the top floor of the Ashmolean. I was the only one there, as if I were the sole conqueror of this tiny, two-room island. But it didn't take long for them to find me.

At some point, I'd resigned myself to thinking that American tourists were the least of the British's worries. I was wrong. A group of middle-aged, American women chatted their way up the stairs and, it seemed at least, made a beeline to my spot.

"You know, we found some T-shirts for 5 each."

"Wow, that's the cheapest I've seen."

"Yes, but you know we got back to the hotel and realized the shirts had misspellings."

Good lord, I thought. Please don't embarrass me. The whole world could hear their tale of woe, and there I was, another American—probably with them for all the world knew—and I wanted to yell out, "We're not all like that!"

But aren't we?

It took two more weeks of travel for me to realize just how invasive tourism is. Forget from which culture people are, their ages, their backgrounds. All I could remember was the picture I'd drawn in my head of the British: staunch, disheartened, unemotional. But, maybe it's all of us who have made them that way, or at least made them seem so.

After three weeks in Oxford, I finally understood: Shut up. That, and don't travel anywhere in the summer, lest you fancy a nervous breakdown amongst the masterpieces at the Ashmolean.

Images of a Hippie Childhood

Luke Eden

A purple chair, old and giant, that hangs suspended in a tree. Thick, coarse ropes creak softly as I swing. Blackberries, sequestered away in a thick tangle of thorns, plucked greedily by gobbling little fingers as we walk to the farm for eggs. The smell of steam and wood as I sit in a bucket of cool water inside the hot cedar sauna. A long summer in a van as we drive across country. I open my birthday presents at a rest stop on the battered old futon we have instead of seats in the back. Afraid, hands rough like pine bark from years spent at a potters wheel are soft as silk soothing me to sleep.

The Eerie Fog of Spider Webs In Moonlight

Melanie K. Greenwood

The footsteps of the wind
Over fallen leaves,
The unneeded stick
From the home just built,
Dropped by the bird
Through the shadow of someone
Who is not there.

Loneliness consumes the dark yard
Filled only by the fading memory
Of Him.

He who once brought joy
And laughter
And contentment in life.

Forgotten, but not gone.

A yearning still resists the desire
To ignore the love, the first love.
Because He first loved, I love.

I look to the world to find my love,
My love resides not on the ground

But above ground, above the moon,
Higher than I shall surely reach,

Except by His love.

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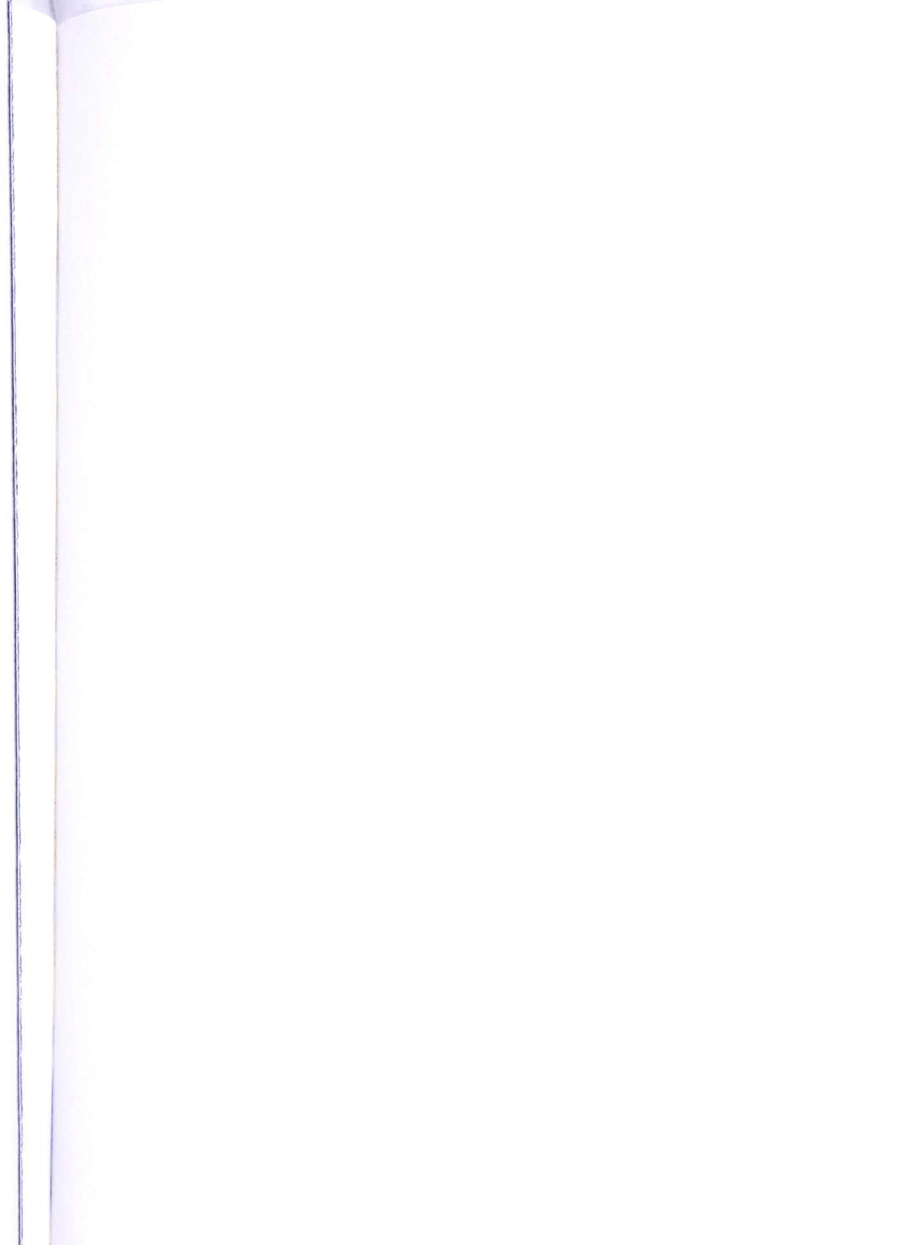
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